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News and Notes

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FRENCH HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS UNDER ATTACK FOR WHISTLEBLOWING

G rard Dubois, professor of public health at Amiens University Hospital, was sued in autumn 2009 by the Conf d ration des Buralistes (the French tobacconists' union) after he stated on French TV that cigarettes kill two smokers a year for every tobacconist. He won, but the case has gone to appeal.

In 1991, Dubois and four colleagues drafted a report that resulted in France's first major anti-tobacco law, the Loi Evin. Dubois also secured a two-phase regulation which banned smoking in the workplace and all public places. Now the professor is fighting his libel case with help from the Comit  National Contre le Tabagisme (the National Committee against Smoking, an NGO). His university, however, remains silent.

In a similar situation, Dr Alain Braillon, a senior tenured consultant in Professor Dubois' unit at Amiens University Hospital, was fired in December 2009. He has been outspoken in his claims that the alcohol industry and other vested interests have undue influence over French health policy. His ex-employers deny that this activity has any bearing on his sacking. France's National Management Centre (the counterpart of the UK's Department of Health) investigated only after the event to confirm Braillon's sacking, and did so without hearing evidence from him. A large majority of the members of the National Statutory Committee objected to the sacking, but the National Management Centre overturned the members' advice and upheld the university's decision to terminate employment.

The French General Medical Council remains silent but many professionals, leaders and organizations from various specialities are publicly supporting Braillon in the French media.

Source: Alain Braillon and G rard Dubois, Whistleblowing and the Abuse of Libel Law, *HealthWatch Newsletter*, issue 79, October 2010: <http://www.healthwatch-uk.org/hw79.htm>